

NEWS

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TAKE PRECAUTIONS BEFORE FLOODING OCCURS

With the Boise River expected to reach flood stage Thursday and runoff from high levels of snowfall continuing, homeowners should make general preparations to keep their family safe from the threat of flooding. While it is impossible to control rainfall or completely avoid flooding, Central District Health offers homeowners tips to respond appropriately to health hazards that may occur as a result of flooding.

"We are particularly concerned with private sewage systems and domestic wells in our three rural counties," stated Rob Howarth, Director of Environmental Health and Emergency Preparedness for Central District Health.

Bacterial contamination of drinking water is very common when private water supplies are compromised with floodwater. Water supplies that are contaminated with bacteria can cause gastrointestinal illness. In addition, when flooding conditions occur, private sewage systems may not function properly and may cause hazardous situations for homeowners.

A good general precaution is to always wash hands with soap and water, from non-contaminated water sources or water that has been boiled before preparing or eating food; after toilet use; or following flood clean-up activities. What follows are some general preparations to help keep your family safe when you expect flooding.

PREPARING FOR FLOODING

To prepare for a flood you should:

- Make sure all septic tanks are full of liquid. The high-water season is not the time to have tanks pumped; empty tanks are buoyant and may "pop" out of the ground during flooding.
- If necessary, plug floor drains to keep sewage from backing up into the basement, but be aware that floodwaters may still enter the basement through cracks and seams.

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DURING A FLOOD

- Discontinue use of your private sewage system. When necessary, shut off power to a sewage lift pump if you have one in the house or in a pump chamber (mound, in-ground pressure, at-grade systems).
- Remember that a well may become contaminated during a flood. Therefore, DO NOT DRINK THE WATER until it has been tested and you know that it is safe. Drink bottled water, or disinfect water before drinking. If your private water supply is flooded you can take steps to disinfect the well. Call Central District Health for instructions, at (208) 327-7499 and/or visit their website at www.cdhd.idaho.gov.
- Do not bathe or swim in floodwater. It may contain harmful organisms.

AFTER THE FLOOD

- Do not use the sewage system until water in the disposal field is lower than the water level around the house.
- If you suspect damage to your septic tank, have it professionally inspected and serviced. Signs of damage include settling or inability to accept water. Most septic tanks are not damaged by a flood since they are below ground and completely covered. However, sometimes septic tanks or pump chambers become filled with silt and debris, and must be professionally cleaned. If tile lines in the disposal field are filled with silt, a new system may have to be installed in new trenches. Because septic tanks may contain dangerous gases, only trained specialists should clean or repair them.
- Discard any items that are damaged by contaminated water and cannot be steam cleaned or adequately cleaned and disinfected.
- Do not pump water out of basements too quickly. Exterior water pressure could collapse the walls.
- If floodwater backs up in a basement, clean the area and disinfect the floor with a chlorine solution of one-half cup of chlorine bleach to 1 gallon of water.

Additional resources for information on flood recovery:

Centers for Disease Control:

Recovering after a flood: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/floods>

Reentering Your Flooded Home: www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/reenter.asp

Protecting Yourself from Mold www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/protect.asp

Call the CDC at 800-CDC-INFO (English and Spanish) or 888-232-6348 (TTY).

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